

# **PRIEST-KINGS OR PURITANS? CHILDE AND WILLING SUBORDINATION IN THE INDUS**

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*Abstract:* One of the Indus Civilization's most striking features is its cultural uniformity evidenced by a common script, artefact forms and motifs, weights and measures, and the presence of proscribed urban plans. Early excavators and commentators utilized ideas of diffusion, and concepts of kingship and slavery remained prevalent within interpretations of the Indus. Whilst Childe questioned ideas of diffusion and hereditary rule he still identified a system of economic exploitation in which the vast majority of the population were subordinated. More recently scholars have begun to argue that small sections of the Indus population may have willingly subordinated themselves in order to secure positions of power. This article explores the dichotomy between traditional Eurocentric normative models of social organization and those derived from south Asian cultural traditions.

*Keywords:* asceticism, Harappa, Indus Valley, Mohenjo-daro, Mortimer Wheeler, social organization, Stuart Piggott, Vere Gordon Childe

## **INTRODUCTION**

First identified at the cities of Harappa and Mohenjo-daro in the 1920s by Sir John Marshall, the Mature Phase or Integration Era of the Indus Civilization is dated between 2500–1900 BC (Shaffer 1992). Covering almost a million square kilometres, it extends from Gujarat in the southwest, to the Makran Coast in the east and as far north as

Shortugai in Afghanistan. Whilst Childe and Wheeler interpreted its rapid appearance as evidence of a degree of diffusion from the Near East (Childe 1939; Childe 1942; Wheeler 1953; Childe 1954), these models have since been refuted by the discovery of evidence for an incipient urban phase. This phase, termed the Regionalization Era (Shaffer 1992:444ff) is now thought to have developed from the region's pre-pottery Neolithic that began in the 7th millennium BC.

One of the Indus Civilization's most striking features is its cultural uniformity, despite the fact that it encompasses extremely diverse ecological settings, which vary from the Cholistan Desert in the east, to the alluvial plains of the Indus and the mountainous coast of the Makran. This striking uniformity is provided by a common script, artefact forms and motifs, weights and measures, and the presence of proscribed urban plans. The first unit of uniformity, the Indus script, remains undeciphered, but it is thought to represent a logo-syllabic script written from left to right. Its known corpus of 3700 inscriptions, recovered from sites stretching between southern Asia and the Persian Gulf, contains only 170 common simple signs and 170 common composite signs (Parpola 1993). Uniformity is also noted within the size and shape of stone blades, bronze tools, stone beads, ceramic forms, and even painted decorations, strongly suggesting a common artefactual standard (Allchin and Allchin 1982:193-202, 221-225). Polished stone weights have been discovered throughout the Indus Civilization and as far west as the Persian Gulf. All share a single binary system of 1, 2, 4, 8, 16, 32, and up to 12,800 and, although the system of measurement is less certain, the fact that the dimension of both baked and unbaked bricks follow the ratio of 1:2:4 suggests a shared or common standard. Finally, there is an apparent common urban plan, as illustrated by those of Mohenjo-daro in Sindh and Harappa in the Punjab – the first two Indus sites to be discovered (Childe 1942:135, Wheeler 1959:7ff). They are widely held to share a plan of a raised rectangular mud-brick podium in the west (referred to as a 'citadel') and a lower but larger mud-brick town in the east (referred to as a 'lower town'). This dual pattern has also been identified at a number of other settlements throughout the region such as Surkotada (Joshi 1990) and Kalibangan (Lal 1979). This uniformity is quite remarkable in view of the lack of raw resources in the alluvial Indus flood plain and the redistribution of raw materials and finished goods across such a vast area. Even more remarkable is the fact that this shared collection of attributes appears to

demonstrate little change throughout the Integration Era's 600-year span. In Wheeler's (1953:108) words:

The Indus citizens seem to have drawn the penalty of early success: a complacency, even self-satisfaction, which impeded further effort. Our ... knowledge does not suggest any trend towards new social or aesthetic horizons.

Pioneering scholars, such as Piggott (1950), Wheeler (1953; 1959), and Childe (1942; 1954), amongst others, attempted to link the uniformity seen within the artefactual record with the notion of social uniformity within the Indus. Moreover, these scholars treated social uniformity as synonymous with cultural stagnation and an imposed subordination of large swathes of the population (Wheeler 1953:108). These Orientalist overviews have dominated normative models of the Indus and have assumed that the caste system was the mechanism for imposing both uniformity and stagnation (Piggott 1950:139). Despite the presence of more recent alternative models (Fairervis 1986; Miller 1985; Rissman 1988) which propose that such uniformity may be a consequence of willing subordination, the pioneers' projections have remained dominant, as demonstrated by Dhavalikar's interpretations (1995; Dhavalikar et al. 1996). This article explores the archaeological evidence both for and against the presence of subordinated communities within the Indus, and examines models derived from south Asian cultural traditions and post-processual theory that suggest individuals may have willingly subordinated themselves in order to secure positions of power rather than having been subordinated through caste.

## **SUBORDINATED COMMUNITIES**

The earliest excavations of the Indus cities, Mohenjo-daro (Marshall 1931; Mackay 1938), Harappa (Vats 1940), and Chanhudaro (Mackay 1943), were primarily concerned with large-scale horizontal excavations and with identifying the cultural affiliations of the sites. Although the 'Indus' or 'Harappa' culture was identified as an independent entity, archaeologists naturally looked west to the more famous and spectacular cities of Mesopotamia, Egypt, and the Mediterranean littoral for their analogies. These archaeologists were mainly Europeans who had been trained at

excavations in the aforementioned areas, and consequently, their interpretations consisted of ‘kings, urban capitals, slaves, citadels, and alien invasions in the Indus Valley’ (Fairervis 1986:43), utilizing the imperial frameworks of Near Eastern archaeology. Concepts of kingship and slavery remained prevalent within Indus Valley studies for many decades, strengthened by the writings of Childe and Wheeler. The concept of a priestly class ruling over a sprawling empire firmly placed the Indus within the same archaeological category as the Egyptian and Middle Eastern Bronze Age ‘Civilizations’, and the influences of Oriental Despotism (Wittfogel 1957) and the Asiatic Mode of Production (Marx 1906) are clear within these early interpretations.

The concept of subordinated communities within the Indus stems from the earliest excavations of Mohenjo-daro and Harappa, when Sir John Marshall first recognized the similarities between the two sites (Marshall 1931). These two sites, significantly larger than any other known site at the time, became the focal points of the majority of socio-political interpretations of the Indus Valley. In their reconstructions of Indus society, both Wheeler (Director-General of Archaeology in India 1944–1947 and later Archaeological Adviser to the Government of Pakistan) and Piggott (who was stationed in India during the Second World War and later became Abercromby Chair in Prehistoric Archaeology at the University of Edinburgh 1946–1977) identified Mohenjo-daro and Harappa as the ‘twin capitals’ of an empire. Wheeler drew attention to the methodically planned cities with rectangular blocks dissected by well-drained streets dominated by an acropolis or citadel mound. These citadel mounds were crowned with ‘ritual’ buildings, including the ‘State Granary’ at Mohenjo-daro which was the ‘focal point of the regime’, whilst at Harappa there were supplementary granaries that were ‘marshalled on the lower ground’ (Wheeler 1959:97). Lothal was described as a ‘regimented coastal township’ (ibid.). Wheeler’s use of terms such as *state*, *regime*, *marshalled*, and *regimented* presented an image of military or political domination achieved through the use of force, similar in nature to the later Kushan, Mughal, and Raj empires in south Asia. Piggott (1950:138) envisaged agricultural output being under municipal control through the use of ‘great granaries strangely foreshadowing those of the Roman Army’.

Wheeler’s (1959:97ff) concept of an ‘Indus Empire’ was dependent on a series of interpretations and assumptions made regarding Harappa and Mohenjo-daro. Firstly,

that the two cities were rigorously planned, and that this indicated the presence of a centralized governing power that could mobilize labour and impose its concepts of urban planning on cities and, secondly, that both cities were separated into a 'lower town' and 'citadel', the latter built on a raised mud-brick platform containing ritual and public buildings such as the 'State Granary' at Mohenjo-daro. Thirdly, that the citadels housed the rulers of the cities, whilst the Lower Town maintained a prosperous middle class. Wheeler identified that both Mohenjo-daro and Harappa were capital cities that dominated a partially defined province or domain and were part of the same uniform cultural phenomenon. Finally, Wheeler stated that this cultural uniformity is apparent and overriding throughout the entirety of the Indus Valley Tradition. Central to Wheeler's argument was his assumption that urbanization within the Indus Valley was not an entirely indigenous phenomenon, although he rejected the concept of a full-scale colonization of the region from Mesopotamia. As a result, Wheeler (1959:106) suggested that although the city of Ur evolved naturally from a fourth millennium BC village to a third millennium BC city, Mohenjo-daro, due to the diffusion of the 'urban concept', was designed with an already fully established concept of civic form. At Kot Diji, where there was (at the time of his writing) evidence of a substantial earlier settlement, Wheeler inferred an earlier 'failed' attempt to colonize the river valley.

Piggott (1950:134) developed Wheeler's concept of imperial hierarchies by heavily emphasizing the agrarian character of the Indus Valley Tradition, envisaging a 'considerable agricultural population producing an adequate surplus beyond its immediate needs for sale to the towns'. He also identified Harappa and Mohenjo-daro as northern and southern capitals respectively. This idea appears to have been influenced by his experience of the British Raj and Mughal Empires in south Asia, where Delhi acted as a winter capital and Simla, further north and at a higher altitude, functioned as the summer capital. The uniformity of artefacts and materials within the Indus Valley was explained through a rigidly enforced set of laws, a strongly established commercial code and standardization of manufacturing techniques (Piggott 1950:138). Piggott not only viewed the Indus Valley Tradition as spatially uniform, but also temporally uniform. Throughout nine phases of rebuilding at Mohenjo-daro during a 700-year period Piggott (1950:139ff) identified little change in the material culture of the site – something he highlighted as indicative of cultural conservatism and possible cultural stagnation. The parallel he drew was not with the Near Eastern communities with which

Wheeler identified, but Central and South America polities with their 'rigorously authoritarian rule and elaborate religious conceptions' (ibid.:140). Finally, Piggott inferred an indigenous origin for the Indus Valley Tradition, albeit with some external influence as to concepts of urbanization and statehood. He did, however, concede that knowledge of this earlier period was minimal.

Piggott (1950) and Wheeler (Wheeler 1959) both assigned a theocratic nature to the social structure of the Indus cities. As Piggott (1950:201) put it:

It is clear that the potent forces behind the organization of the Harappan kingdom cannot have been wholly secular, and there is, as we have already seen, more than a hint that the priesthood of some religion played a very important part in the regulation of the Harappan economy from within the walls of the citadels of the two capital cities.

The partnering of the citadels with the Priest-King equated the Indus cities with the better-known urban centres of Egypt, Mesopotamia, and the Mediterranean. According to Wheeler, although the lower towns of the Indus cities were inhabited by a substantial middle-class element financed through trade and industry, the primary economy was still agricultural in nature (Wheeler 1953: 84). Excavations at Mohenjo-daro identified a group of 16 rooms in Block 5 of Section B, HR area, consisting of 12 central rooms measuring 4x6m with a small internal dividing wall, and four end units measuring 4x6.7m divided into four rooms. These rooms were divided by a street running north-south, with an additional lane separating the four end units. A similar series of 15 rooms was identified on the northeastern corner of Mound AB at Harappa, although these were oriented along an east-west running street. Each unit measured 7.3m wide and 17m deep and consisted of two brick-paved cells. The entire complex at Harappa was located on a small mound, and is associated with 17 circular brick platforms. Piggott (1950:169) likened the rooms to 'contemporary coolie-lines', and subordinate to the nearby residential areas due to their small size. Wheeler (1953:32-34) identified that the entranceway to these rooms was through an oblique passage designed to ensure privacy, and that they were 'a piece of government planning' and that 'it might reflect a servile or semi-servile element of the sort familiar in the theocratic administrations of Sumer'.

However, rather than 'coolie-lines', he suggested that they may alternatively have been barracks or priest's quarters.

Subsequent scholars have chosen to follow Wheeler. Thus, the Allchins stated that 'immediately below the walls of the citadel were two rows of single-roomed barracks, recalling the smallest dwellings in the lower city of Mohenjo-daro and the artisans' or slaves' quarters in such sites as Tel-el-Armana in Egypt' (Allchin and Allchin 1982:183). Lal identified a similar complex to the south of Kalibangan's citadel mound, suggesting that as the houses were small and associated with craft-working debris, the area was probably the location of a 'colony of manual labourers' (Lal 1993:65). More recently, Dhavalikar has identified a further example at Kuntasi in Gujarat. In this settlement, interpreted by its excavator as a factory fort (Dhavalikar, Raval et al. 1996), poorly-built dormitories were identified close to the eastern gate 'probably for ... artisans who were brought by the Harappans with them' (ibid.:43ff). Dhavalikar (1995:172) also suggested that the small shell-working site of Nageshwar may have housed specialized labourers, perhaps even 'slave craftsmen'.

## **CHILDE AND THE INDUS**

Although Childe initially presumed a direct link between Mesopotamia and the emergence of "civilization" within the Indus (1942: 136f), it was not until the fourth edition of *New Light on the Most Ancient East* (published at a similar time to Wheeler and Pigott's seminal works) that he questioned the notion of external stimuli as the catalyst for urbanization in the Indus Valley, citing evidence of early occupations and urbanization at Kot Diji and Amri (1954: 187). Childe also questioned whether political rule was hereditary, as had been traditionally assumed, and proposed the concept of competing groups vying for political control. This concept of non-hereditary political rule pervades the more recent city-state series of models (Possehl 1993; Kenoyer 1994; Kenoyer 1998). For Childe (1954:176), the crux of the Indus Valley economy lay in the agricultural potential of the alluvial river valley, despite the self-confessed lack of archaeological evidence for large-scale agricultural practices or irrigation works. However, the underlying Marxist credentials of Childe (Trigger 1986:9ff; Trigger 1986:

9ff) inevitably led him to adopt an economic principle in terms of social structure. Wheeler, on the other hand, proposed an authoritarian structure, loosely equating to traditional Edwardian British society. According to Wheeler (1959:84), although the lower towns of the Indus Valley cities were inhabited by a substantial middle-class element financed through trade and industry, the primary economy would still have been agricultural.

However, Childe retained and developed ideas of subordinated communities developed by Marshall (1931), in particular the concept of a racial hierarchy. Childe stated that the Proto-Australoid element of the population was subservient to the Sumerian, Eurasian, or Mediterranean population. He also explicitly equated the Proto-Australoid element of Indus society with modern Dravidian populations of south India, whilst the Mediterranean population were immigrants from the west who brought with them the concept of 'Civilization' (Childe 1954:175). Furthermore, Childe (1954) likened the Indus Priest-Kings with the Sumerian 'city-god' and the Egyptian pharaoh, whose power resided in control over the urban granaries and the concentration of agricultural wealth. As such, this racial division became not only a social hierarchy, but also an economic one. Childe interpreted this as a form of economic exploitation, as opposed to the theocratic dictatorship proposed by Marshall (1931) and reinforced by Piggott (1950) and Wheeler (1953). Rather than 'coolie-lines' or servants quarters, Childe (1954:175) interpreted the small two-roomed structures of Harappa and Mohenjo-daro as housing artisans, most likely bonded to the Indus bourgeois who inhabited the spacious two-storied houses of the lower town. He also maintained the citadel-lower town divide of rulers and ruled, though he suggests that wealthy merchants and traders from the largest cities supported the ruling king. However, he did not indicate whether this ruling figure would have been hereditary or if there were competing groups involved in struggles for power. Childe envisaged a society that was heavily dependent upon economic co-operation between the various cities within the Indus Valley region, and argued that political rule was mostly secular.

Within the archaeological literature, the subordinated communities housed within the cities are paralleled by the presence of dominant communities on the neighbouring citadel mounds. Indeed, Wheeler (1953:34) suggested that '[f]ull in the public eye, and more especially in that of the rulers on the citadel, there was nothing



furtive in the little Harappan cantonment'. The contrast between the well-preserved structures on the summit of Mohenjo-daro's citadel, with its great bath, college, granary, and pillared hall, and on the other the 'subordinated' complexes, could not have been greater in terms of their extent, height, and degree of monumentality. The hypothesized presence of a subordinated element of Indus society appears well supported by the archaeological evidence for differentiated housing blocks within a number of settlements, and its existence would provide a logical explanation for the apparent uniformity and timeless nature of artefacts.

## **WILLING SUBORDINATION**

The presence of substantial numbers of hunter-gatherers and pastoralists within the Indus system (Possehl and Kennedy 1979; Fairservis 1986) has added unforeseen and archaeologically invisible additions to the variables characterizing the social organization of the Indus Civilization. It has also been widely noted that the structures identified by Wheeler as granaries at Mohenjo-daro, Harappa, and Lothal are all very different and very possibly not granaries at all (Fentress 1976:138). Even the similarity between the dual plans of Harappa and Mohenjo-daro has been refuted, with Kenoyer (1998:55) suggesting that most of Harappa's mounds were walled, including Mound F which housed the so-called subordinate communities. The assumption that craft activities would have been located in certain quarters within the cities (Piggott 1950:170) has also been refuted by detailed surveys carried out at Mohenjo-daro. Kenoyer, for example, analysed the distribution of shell-working, expecting to find that it was concentrated as a large-scale industry in one urban zone under central control (Kenoyer 1985). His analysis, however, identified that shell-working was carried out throughout the site and was geared towards a localized market. Similar patterns were recorded for ceramic production, metal-working and even faience-making and steatite-working (Pracchia, Tosi et al. 1985:241), providing a diverse pattern where 'the average size of production appears to be restricted, something between the side of a room and a courtyard' (Coningham 1994:49). Other surprises include the fact that seals and other 'prestige' items usually associated with rank, ownership, redistribution, and wealth were

found in lower frequency on the citadel mounds of Harappa and Mohenjo-daro than within the lower towns (Fentress 1976:241).

Fairservis (1986) developed concepts of decentralization and the lack of state-level institutions even further by proposing that the Integration Era was organized along the lines of a developed chiefdom. Influenced by the growing number of small sites (<1ha) being identified and emerging evidence of short-term occupation of many sites – including Mohenjo-daro – Fairservis (Fairservis 1986; Fairservis 1989) suggested a model of political organization centred upon cattle herds and pastoralism. Although some archaeologists have incorporated an element of pastoralism into their peripheries (Possehl 1993; Kenoyer 1998), Fairservis placed the pastoral communities at the core of the Indus Valley Tradition. The concept that wealth lay outside of the urban centres may explain the contradictions evident in the Indus Valley cities when compared to other contemporary communities. Whilst the absence of clearly dominant communities has left many scholars baffled, several archaeologists have followed Fairservis in rejecting normative concepts of state-level societies. They have identified a number of weaknesses in existing interpretations of the Indus Civilization (Miller 1985; Rissman 1988; Shaffer 1993). These approaches have concentrated upon social dynamics and human agency in order to explain the social organization of the Indus Civilization, stressing concepts of asceticism and the deliberate manipulation of social structures in order to mask inequality. Shaffer provided the earliest hint towards an ascetic model of social organization in a critical review of the position of Indus Valley studies (Shaffer 1993). Rejecting Piggott's (1950) concept of a strong centralized governing body, Shaffer (1993:44ff) suggested that the similarity and homogeneity in style and manufacture reflects the existence of an intensive internal distribution system. Furthermore, he suggested that even the smallest sites, such as Allahdino, have yielded examples of almost every known Indus artefact form, even gold, silver, and semiprecious stone.

As for providing an alternative explanation of Indus Valley socio-political organization, Shaffer relied heavily upon the manufacture of metal objects and excavations at Allahdino. He considered metal objects mostly utilitarian in function, a direct contradiction to Mesopotamia where metal objects were considered luxury, status items (Shaffer 1993:46), and the lack of metal objects within graves supported this

interpretation (ibid.:47). However, the distribution and manufacture of objects of metal and semiprecious stone were not, in Shaffer's opinion, without symbolic meaning. Because they represented a conscious effort in terms of manufacturing, the possession of such items must have imparted some element of social distinction on the owner(s). Nevertheless, Shaffer (1993:49) suggested that the inability to identify consistent contextual associations of metal and semiprecious stone objects implies that, unlike Mesopotamia, these objects were available to a large proportion of Indus Valley society. He suggested that their absence within burials may indicate that: (1) such wealth objects were not hereditary; (2) they were not considered particularly important indicators of social status; (3) the objects were redistributed at the time of death; (4) there was an absence of well-defined social stratification; or (5) some other cultural rule was at work designating their presence or absence in burials. This suggestion of non-hereditary wealth, and social rules that consciously or unconsciously subvert social structures was developed further by Miller (1985) and Rissman (1988) – although their work has been largely overlooked by Indus archaeologists.

In his paper, *Ideology and the Harappan Civilization*, Miller (1985:52-56) noted that there was a distinct lack of architectural decoration and that house forms were relatively homogenous. In fact, he identified a lack of evidence for any change in almost every artefactual form for the entire span of the Mature Indus Civilization. Regarding these artefacts, Miller identified that, whilst settlements were engaged in long distance trade for raw materials, the vast majority of artefacts were manufactured locally. The lack of imported 'prestige items' lead Miller to postulate that there was some form of 'embargo upon the importation of foreign manufactures'. These inferences convinced Miller that there was no evidence of a class of wealthy individuals – the ruling élites of the normative approaches – and who have in no way demarcated their distinctiveness within society. Miller relied on the work of Sarcina, who in her analysis of house sizes within Mohenjo-daro stated that 'the quality of found objects suggest a well-distributed welfare and a comfortable standard of living, devoid of either luxury, on the one hand, or evident signs of exploitation on the other' (Sarcina 1979:185), and that the so-called 'coolie-lines' (Piggott 1950:31) were 'built with the same care as the larger houses' (Sarcina 1979:186). Miller saw such homogeneity as a tendency towards formalism, where artefacts 'refer not to groups of people, regions, or other external factors, but only to the style, that is, the order within which they were created' (Miller 1985:59).

Furthermore, he envisaged a civilization that ‘opposes itself at every point to nature’, where institutionalized principles masked social inequality and the standardization of both artefacts and settlements ensured the reproduction of the formal order that imposed this ideology (ibid.:60). Miller also suggested that ‘the people of the Harappan who may be said to have power may not have enjoyed privileged wealth or conspicuous consumption, and indeed are more likely to have been conspicuous through asceticism’ (ibid.:61). Developing this concept, he suggested that the so-called ‘barracks’ (Wheeler 1953) or ‘coolie-lines’ (Piggott 1950) found within the citadel mounds were more likely to have housed monks than slaves. Consequently, a normative tendency towards Puritanism was identified as a more likely explanation for the social organization of the Indus Civilization, rather than the normative projections of priests and Priest-Kings. Within the apparently timeless nature of the Indus (Piggott 1950), Miller conceived a society in which an ‘extreme normative order was valued and combined control over the world. Such an order was antagonistic to anything which threatened it, which meant anything not generated by it’ (Miller 1985:63).

Rissman (1988) built on these concepts by examining the apparent correlation between grave goods and hoards. The impetus for his work was the growing corpus of work in the early 1980s that questioned whether deliberately deposited artefacts reflect social relations, but rather that there is potential for the manipulation of material culture by dominant groups who seek political legitimacy (Hodder 1982; Shanks and Tilley 1982; Shennan 1982; Miller and Tilley 1984). Integral to Rissman’s methodology was Bourdieu’s concept that:

the dominant culture contributes to the real integration of the dominant class; to the fictitious integration of the society as a whole, and hence to the demobilization (false consciousness) of the dominated classes; and to the legitimization of the established order by the establishment of distinctions (hierarchies) and the legitimization of these distinctions. The dominant culture produces its function of division under its function of communication. (Bourdieu 1979:79)

Rissman utilized this concept of ideological manipulation in his definitions of grave goods and hoards. The public nature of grave goods, offerings and other displays of

wealth can be seen as deliberately misrepresenting social relations in an outright attempt to conceal domination, and therefore cannot be utilized as objective indicators of wealth (Rissman 1988:209). On the other hand, Rissman believed hoarding to be a private and secular act and the pure opposite of display, and as such, hoards may be considered, archaeologically, as more objective indicators of status distinctions. From his analysis of hoards from several Indus Valley sites, he concluded ‘*if* the Harappan hierarchy of secular value was characterised by some degree of inequality in value distribution, and by some degree of rigidity in status distinctions, these qualities were *concealed* in the public domain by the ideology of value’ (Rissman 1988:219;original italics). Significantly, four of the seven hoards identified at Harappa were located within Mound F, the area Piggott (1950) and Wheeler (1953) identified as ‘coolie-lines’ or ‘barracks’. Such wealthy deposits would not normally be associated with an apparently subordinated community such as this. However, their presence, along with one of the hoards from Mohenjo-daro (which was also found within a traditionally assumed subordinated area), suggests that the inhabitants of these regions had equal, if not greater, access to resources as the remainder of the community. In contrast, only a single hoard was identified from within the citadels of Harappa and Mohenjo-daro, the presumed areas of wealth and power (Rissman 1988:218), and their distribution within the lower towns was equally well spaced.

## **CONCLUSION: WILLING OR COERCIVE SUBORDINATION**

Miller (1985), Rissman (1988), and Shaffer (1993) all challenged the normative orthodox models of the Indus Civilization, and concluded that the archaeological record represents a deliberately distorted view of the social structure prevailing at the time. The two localities widely identified as domiciles of subordinated elements of Indus society, Mound F at Harappa and Block 5 at Mohenjo-daro, can now be interpreted as housing those with access to supraordinate wealth. Neither Miller nor Rissman has suggested that these ‘barracks’ housed the rulers of Harappa or Mohenjo-daro, and their role remains unclear. It is quite possible that the inhabitants of these architectural units did indeed form part of a subordinated community, but perhaps one which willingly subordinated itself. Such a hypothesis is partially framed by Miller who suggested that

the inhabitants of the rooms were more likely to be monks than slaves and that ‘those who can maintain the greatest distance from ordinary enterprise ... are ... granted an authority and power’ (Miller 1985:61). Indeed, there are numerous examples within the historical period of south Asia of the power of charismatic individuals who have willingly subordinated themselves by renouncing material wealth and temporal position (Tambiah 1976; Tambiah 1984). Such individuals often achieved great influence and power through a number of associated characteristics such as harsh ascetic practices (Coningham 2001). It is also apparent that the more austere communities became, the more influential they were, as illustrated by the political dominance of the Sri Lankan *Pamsukulka*, or ‘those clothed in rags from dustheaps’ during the eighth to tenth centuries AD (Coningham 1999).

This is not to suggest that such interpretations are fully supported by the data, indeed, Miller’s statement that differential consumption never occurred (Miller 1985:62) has been challenged by the results of Rissman’s comparison of the relative wealth of grave goods and that of hoards. Assuming burials related to a public display of wealth he noted that they were associated with a ‘low secular value of grave goods’ (Rissman 1988:217), but that inequality, at least in terms of wealth, was clearly apparent within private settings in the context of hoards. As such, Rissman’s work can be seen to demonstrate that the archaeological record provides a distorted view of the social structure of the Indus Civilization, but that this is not due to natural transforms (survival rates or excavation techniques), but rather a deliberate attempt by élite groups to mask any inequality that may have existed. Clearly, such examples strongly undermine the normative approach to identifying the social organization of the Indus Civilization, as it is quite possible that willingly subordinated communities may have been responsible for, in the words of Miller, ensuring ‘the reproduction of order’ (Miller 1985:64). It may be suggested that while traditional archaeological correlates of rank and inequality (Peebles and Kus 1977; Price and Feinman 1995) may identify the presence or absence of subordinate communities they are quite inadequate in allowing us to identify whether such communities held a dominant position within a society as a whole, or whether their constituent members became subordinated through choice or coercion.

In order to fully understand the social and economic organization of the Indus Civilization, archaeologists will need to accept and understand the distortion of the archaeological record generated by preconceived notions of past societies, which are in turn influenced by archaeologists' own social and political backgrounds. Trigger famously stated that '[w]hilst archaeological discoveries initiated by the Europeans have long encouraged a pride in India's past among its educated élite, there is even less evidence of nationalism influencing the practice of Indian Archaeology' (Trigger 1989:271). Yet, research focused on the Indus Civilization has clearly demonstrated that such a broad statement about south Asian archaeology is in fact erroneous. Childe's (1954) focus upon the economic exploitation of the populous reflected his own Marxist belief systems, and was published within the context of the post-colonial world in which subordinated communities throughout the world, including south Asia, were gaining their independence and freedom and accusing their previous colonial rulers of both economic and social imperialism. In many ways, this reflects our own changing understanding of the Indus Civilization, from its imperial beginnings (i.e. Mackay 1938; Marshall 1931) to the postmodern reflections of Miller (1985) and Rissman (1988). Along the way, the Indus Civilization has been the recipient of postcolonial reaction (Childe 1954), nationalist impositions of Vedic belief systems (Lal 1993; Talageri 1993; Rajaram and Frawley 1995), and 'New World' models of chiefdoms (Fairservis 1989). However, until its script is deciphered, or more rigorous archaeological methodologies are adopted, the very nature of the Indus Civilization's social and economic infrastructure and framework will be unclear, allowing successive generations of archaeologists to reflect their own ethnocentric ideals and values upon this silent Bronze Age world.

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